WINSLOW HOMER

BY KENYON COX

THE GULF STREAM

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

Signed and dated; Homer, 1899. Canvas, 28⅞ inches high, 49⅛ inches wide.

WINSLOW HOMER

BY

KENYON COX

NEW YORK
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MCMXIV

TO ITS FIRST READER
PHILIP LITTELL
WHOSE CRITICISM AND ADVICE ON MATTERS OF STYLE
WERE INVALUABLE TO ME
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED.

PREFACE

For the facts and dates of Homer's life I am indebted to "The Life and Works of Winslow Homer" by William Howe Downes, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911. From this book, which I have accepted as the only authority on the subject, I have also borrowed a few quotations from John W. Beatty's "Introductory Note" and from Homer's own letters.

For the interpretation I have put upon the facts, and for the attempt at a critical estimate of Homer's art, I alone am responsible. Upon the validity of this estimate my little book must depend for its excuse for being.

But while the opinions expressed are my own they must often coincide with those expressed by other writers. If they did not the book might be original but would almost certainly be erroneous. I think I have said nothing because others have said it, but I have not had the vanity to refrain from saying anything because it had been already said, or to attempt novelty at the possible cost of truth.

KENYON COX.

ILLUSTRATIONS

WINSLOW HOMER

WINSLOW HOMER

PART ONE

THE painters of America who have gained a certain definiteness and permanence of reputation—those whose names are as well known to dealers and collectors as are the names of leading foreign masters and whose pictures have an established and increasing commercial value—belong, almost without exception, to the generation which reached its majority shortly before the Civil War. The century and a half of painting in America may be roughly divided into three periods of approximately equal length. The first of our painters to attain any considerable eminence were purely English in origin and in training, and the earliest of them were, on the whole, the best; so that the first period may be called that of the decline of the English school in America. The second period was that of the slow evolution of a native school, and this school was on the verge of its highest achievement when the third or present period began; the period of a new foreign influence—mainly French—and of the effort to adapt a technic learned in the schools of continental Europe to the expression of American thought and American feeling. We cannot yet tell how many of our paint-

ers belonging wholly to this last period may achieve a lasting fame. Those who seem already to have achieved it are of the time of transition, and their work marks the culmination of the native school and the beginning of the new influence from abroad.

Their birth dates fall very near together. The oldest of them, Fuller and Hunt, were born in 1822 and 1824 respectively, and Inness came in 1825. Then, after a gap of nine years, we have Whistler in 1834, LaFarge in 1835 and, in the one year 1836, Homer Martin, Wyant, Vedder, and the subject of this book, Winslow Homer. The mere list of names is enough to show the double nature of the work accomplished by the men of this generation. At the outset we have the sharp contrast between Hunt, the pupil of Couture and the friend of Millet, a teacher and a great influence if a somewhat ineffectual artist, making himself, from 1855 to his death in 1879, the apostle of that Barbizon school which was to affect, in greater or less degree, so many others of the group; and Fuller, working by himself on his Deerfield farm, and emerging from obscurity in 1876 as the artistic contemporary of Hunt's pupils and of the young men whom Hunt's preaching had sent to Paris for their education. And the same contrast is repeated, in even sharper form, between Whistler and Homer; between the brilliant cosmopolitan who spent but a few years of his infancy and a few more of his youth in his own country, and the recluse of Prout's Neck; between the dainty symphonist, whose art is American only

because it is not quite English and not quite French, and the sturdy realist who has given us the most purely native work, as it is perhaps the most powerful, yet produced in America.

Winslow Homer came of pure New England stock, being directly descended from one Captain John Homer who sailed from England in his own ship and settled in Boston in the middle of the seventeenth century. His father, Charles Savage Homer, was a hardware merchant in Boston, where Winslow was born on February 24th, 1836, and his mother, Henrietta Maria Benson, came from Bucksport, Maine, a town named after her maternal grandfather. She is said to have had "a pretty talent for painting flowers in watercolors," and her son may have inherited his artistic proclivities from her. There were probably other seafaring men than the first Captain John among the Homer ancestry, and the artist's uncle, James Homer owned a barque and cruised to the West Indies. We cannot doubt that the love of salt water was even more deeply ingrained in Winslow Homer than the love of art, though it was not to show itself until rather late in life.

In 1842, when Homer was six years old, the family removed to Cambridge, and there his boyhood was spent. There was still much of the country village about Cambridge, and Homer and his two brothers lived the healthy life of rural New England, fishing, boating, swimming, playing rough games and going to school. An interesting memorial of this time is

Homer's earliest existing drawing, reproduced in William Howe Downes's "Life and Works" of the artist, under the title of The Beetle and the Wedge. It represents Winslow's elder brother Charles and his cousin George Benson holding the younger brother, Arthur, spread eagle fashion by the arms and legs and about to swing his weight violently against the rear of another innocent youngster squatting on all fours in the grass.

In the lives of artists one expects, as a matter of course, tales of precocious talent, but it is seldom that such evidence of their veracity can be brought forward. Here is a boy of eleven drawing from life, or from memory of personal observation, a composition of four figures in complicated foreshortenings; indicating their several actions and expressions with admirable truth and economy; and, with a few lines and scratches of shade, placing them in their setting of sunlit pasture and distant hillside. Of course the drawing is but a sketch and, equally of course, the ability to make such a sketch does not imply that of carrying it farther. It was long before Homer could put into the form of a definite and completed work of art what is here suggested, but as a sketch, as a rapid notation of the essentials of something seen, it is such as Homer, or any other artist, might, at any period of his career, have been willing to sign. The essential Winslow Homer, the master of weight and movement, is already here in implication. If many of the "heap" of youthful drawings which the artist pre-

served for thirty years or more were of anything like this quality it is no wonder that his father encouraged his aspirations, bought him Julian lithographs to study and, at nineteen, apprenticed him to one Bufford, a lithographer of Boston.

This was in 1855, and Homer thus became a practising artist without ever having been an art student. He seems to have been employed, at once, upon the better class of work turned out by the establishment, and to have designed as well as executed illustrated title-pages for sheet music and the like. During his apprenticeship he managed to pick up from a French wood engraver named Damereau some hints as to methods of drawing on the block, and when his two years were up—on his twentyfirst birthday—he took a studio of his own and set up as an independent illustrator. He worked at first for "Ballou's Pictorial" and later for "Harper's Weekly," and his connection with the latter periodical endured until 1875, while he continued to do occasional book illustration for several years longer.

There are many worse preparations for the career of a painter than the work of a hack illustrator. The illustrator must be ready to draw anything and, if he takes his work seriously and does his tasks as well as he can, he is learning something every day. And he must concentrate his mind on his result, learn to tell his story and to make his intention clear. No one is so little tempted to the modern fallacy that the only business of a painter is to learn to paint, that the subject

is of no importance, and that, if only one is a trained speaker, it matters little whether or not one has anything to say. The illustrator must always say something, whether he says it well or ill. He must make his picture, always, and a fresh picture each time, and his success will depend on the interest of the public in what he does, not on the approval by his fellows of the way in which he does it. Homer's work in black and white was, for the most part, independent of any written text and he seems, generally, to have chosen his subjects for himself. They are very varied and, in the course of his work as an illustrator, he experimented with almost every kind of subject he afterwards made his own as well as with many that he never rendered in color. He did not attempt the ideal or the romantic, but anything that he could see he was ready to draw, dealing impartially with town and with country, and trying his hand at well dressed ladies and gentlemen as at barefoot boys and sunbonneted girls. His first Adirondack studies, his first sea-shore pieces, his first deep-sea scenes, appeared in black and white.

Of the merit of Homer's drawings for illustration it is difficult to judge. American wood engraving was not, in those days, the fine art that it afterwards became, and the blocks on which he worked were cut with a mechanical and somewhat dismal monotony. It is only in the instances where a preliminary water color sketch exists that we can judge how much of beauty and of character was sacrificed in re-

production. If his original drawings direct upon the wood have lost as much in the cutting they must have been far better than we shall ever know. But whatever their artistic value, or lack of it, they were of incalculable importance as a training of the observer and the recorder of observations that Homer was.

In 1859 Homer came to New York, and this city remained his home, when he was at home, for twenty-five years. Here he attended for a time the night class of the National Academy of Design, and had lessons, once a week, on Saturdays, for a month, from a French artist named Rondel. They were the only painting lessons he ever had, and in the catalogue of the Paris Exposition of 1900 he duly appears as "*élève de Frédérick Rondel*"; for in French catalogues one must be a pupil of some one. He appears for the first time as an exhibitor at the Academy exhibition of 1860, with a drawing of Skating in Central Park; probably a study for, or a replica of, one of his illustrations for "Harper's Weekly."

In 1861 Homer seems to have gone to Washington to make drawings of Lincoln's inauguration, and in the next year he was certainly special artist for "Harper's Weekly" with McClellan's army in the Peninsula. He was probably not more than three months at the front, but his experience during that time must have supplied him with many more sketches and studies than are represented in the drawings he sent home, and from these studies he took the subjects of his first pictures. In November of 1862, "Harper's

Weekly" published his Sharpshooter on Picket Duty as "from a painting by W. Homer, Esq.," and this, the first of his works in oil, was followed by Rations, Home, Sweet Home, and The Last Goose at Yorktown. The two latter were exhibited in the National Academy exhibition of 1863, and in 1864 Homer sent to the Academy In Front of the Guard House and The Briarwood Pipe and was promptly elected an Associate. The next year he exhibited The Bright Side and two other pictures and was made a full Academician, though this election is generally attributed to the reputation of Prisoners from the Front, then under way but not ready for exhibition. It appeared at the Academy in 1866, when the artist was thirty years old, and is one of a series of important pictures that mark off the decades of his life in a curious manner. This one may be said to announce the definite conclusion of his 'prentice years. They had been very short, and he was an Academician before any of his group except Vedder, who was elected in the same year, the author of an almost sensationally successful picture, and an artist whose work sold readily at such prices as were then current, all within four years from the beginning of his first painting.

There is something of a mystery about the present ownership of Prisoners from the Front and it does not appear to have been shown in public since the sale of the John Taylor Johnston collection in 1876. It made a deep impression, at the time, not less upon the artists than upon the critics and the public. In 1876 Prof.

John F. Weir called it "a unique work in American art" and thought it better than anything Homer had done in the intervening years; and LaFarge, just before his death, wrote of it as "a marvelous painting, marvelous in every way, but especially in the grasp of the moment." Was it not, above all, to this "grasp of the moment" that it owed its success? In technical merit it can hardly be greatly superior to The Bright Side, which is as much as to say that it must be still decidedly primitive. This latter picture represents a group of negro teamsters basking in the sun outside their tent. A certain piquancy is given to the composition by the placing of the head looking out from the tent-flaps above the loungers, but that is the only touch of purely artistic interest. The drawing is sufficient, no more; the color brown and heavy; the handling entirely without charm. The picture is interesting from its evident truth of observation in character and attitude—that is, for its purely illustrative quality—but as painting it hardly exists. Given this same illustrative value, and a subject so interesting to the public of 1866 as that of the Prisoners from the Front, and we may account for the success of that picture without imagining it to have been much better painted than the other works of this time. They are works from which Homer's future could scarce have been predicted, and they would be already forgotten had not that future brought forth things of very different and vastly greater quality.

IN spite of his precocious boyhood and his rapid success as a young man, Homer's talent as an artist ripened slowly. An Academician before he was thirty, he was forty when he produced the first of his pictures which has something of greatness in it, the first which is admirable in itself rather than interesting as marking a stage of progress; he was nearly fifty before he began the series of pictures dealing with the life of sailors and fishermen which showed him definitely as a great figure painter and an interpreter of humanity; and he was sixty when he painted one of the last and greatest of them. Finally, he was fiftyfour when he painted the first of those pictures of surf and shore, marines without figures or with figures of minor importance, by which he is best known to the great public; and ten or twelve years older when some of the best of them were produced. If he had died at forty he would not now be considered a painter of any importance. If he had died at fifty he would be remembered as an artist of great promise and as the author of a few pictures in which promise had become performance. It is because he lived to be seventyfour that his career is the great and rounded whole we know.

There were reasons internal as well as external for this slowness of development, but the most important reasons were internal. It was, in a sense, the very sturdiness and independence of Homer's character, and the clearness of his vision of what he wanted to

do, that kept him so long learning to do it. We have seen how little was the formal training he had, with what a slender equipment of previous study he set out to express himself in paint, and how his earliest works are saved from utter insignificance only by his native gift of observation, the manner of expression being worse than negligible. Now there were, even in the sixties, and even for a man with his living to earn by illustration or other hack work, opportunities for a fuller education in the technic of his profession than Homer chose to give himself; and if he had as little such education as a Chester Harding, it was not, as in Harding's case, because there was none to be had, but because he would not have it. He was never docile enough to learn from others. While he was still a lithographer's apprentice in Boston he had said to Foxcroft Cole, "if a man wants to be an artist he must never look at pictures," and in that faith he lived and died. At no time of his career did he show much interest in the work of other men or betray any need of that give and take of discussion which forms what is known as an "artistic atmosphere," or of that criticism from those who know without which even a Donatello was afraid of deterioration. He stood alone and was sufficient to himself. When, after his first successes, he felt that he had earned a trip abroad, he went to Paris, in 1867, and spent ten months in that capital, but he did none of the things there that almost any other young artist would have done. He did not go into the schools, he did not copy old or modern

masters, he did not settle in any of the artistic colonies or consort much with other artists; and if he looked at the pictures in the great galleries his subsequent work shows no evidence of it. He came back as he went, and two or three illustrations of Parisian dance halls or of copyists at work in the Louvre and the title Picardie in the Academy catalogue of 1868 are the only things to remind us that he was ever in France.

The choice may have been right for Homer, but it was a choice that carried its penalties with it. A painter has, indeed, other things to do than merely to learn to paint, but he has, after all, to learn to paint; and to insist on discovering the way for one's self is often to take the longest road to one's destination. Homer did, in time, learn to paint sufficiently for his purpose, and though his work in oils always lacked the highest technical distinction it attained to a freedom and power of expression which fitted it admirably to his needs. But this evolution of an adequate method took a very long time, and for the next dozen years the interest in his pictures is rather in his experimental searching for the subjects that suited him than in any greatly increased mastery in his rendering of the subjects he selected.

Had Homer been actuated mainly by commercial considerations he might well have rested where he was, and have gone on, for some years at least, painting military subjects. What he did was the contrary of this, and Prisoners from the Front appears to have

been the last military picture he ever painted. To the same Academy exhibition in which it appeared he sent another canvas called The Brush Harrow. I know nothing of it except the title, but that title leads one to suppose that it was his first attempt at the treatment of American farm life. If any one could have painted that life, and have got out of it something equivalent to what Millet got out of the life of the French peasant, Homer was surely the man. The fact that he failed, as others have done, and has left nothing important in that field, is one more proof that the American farmer is unpaintable. His costume and his tools are too sophisticated to suggest the real simplicity and dignity of his occupation.

For the next few years Homer's subjects are very varied. He seems to be preluding in several directions, and we have, among others, such prophetic titles as The Manchester Coast, 1869, and Sail-boat, 1870. In 1872 he reverted to the memories of his boyhood and painted The Country School and Snap the Whip. This last is one of the most successful of his early pictures and has been frequently re-exhibited. It is painted in a dry and rather timid manner, with hot, brown undertones, and possesses very little beauty; but it makes such an impression of truth that it is quite unforgettable. The drawing, though awkward in details, is alive; the boys are real boys and are really playing with all their might; the landscape, with its little red school-house, is thoroughly characterized; and even the sunlight, though false in color, is so well

observed as to degrees of light and dark, and casts shadows so true in shape, as to be real, hard, glittering sunlight. It is difficult to imagine anyone's loving the picture very much, but no one can help respecting it. The Country School is a very different production, a sketch rather than a finished picture—the small figures so slightly painted as to be transparent in places, allowing the benches to be seen through them—but a sketch possessing a breadth of tone and a charm of handling exceptional in Homer's work. But for the subject, it might almost pass for an early Whistler.

Already, in such a work as Snap the Whip, Homer is beginning to make us feel the glory of out of doors, but to express it fully he needed a larger and rougher sort of life to paint, as well as a more mature manner of painting it. In 1873 he spent a summer on Ten Pound Island in Gloucester Harbor, the immediate result of which was some charming watercolors of coast scenes, including Mrs. Lawson Valentine's delightful Berry Pickers, and in 1874 he went, for the first time, to the Adirondacks. Here, in the life of hunters and guides, was matter to his mind, and his style rose with it. In 1876, when he was forty years old, he painted the first of what may be called his masterpieces, The Two Guides. The brown underpainting is still present, but the handling is larger and freer, with a directness and suppleness comparable to that of his later work. On a mountain ridge overgrown with scrubby bushes stand the guides, axes in hand, one, an old man with long gray beard, point-

NEW ENGLAND COUNTRY SCHOOL

COLLECTION OF MR. FREDERIC FAIRCHILD SHERMAN

Signed and dated; Homer, 1872. Canvas, 12⅛ inches high, 17⅞ inches wide.

THE BERRY PICKERS

(Water-Color)

THE PULSIFER COLLECTION

Signed and dated; Homer, July 1873. Paper, 9⅛ inches high, 13¼ inches wide.

ing out some landmark to his taller and younger comrade. Beyond the foreground ridge is a valley filled with fleecy cloud that rises in ragged shapes against the higher and more distant peak, and floats away to dissipate itself in the bright sunshine of a summer morning. The picture is full of the joy of high places and the splendor of fine weather. Nothing else that I know of in pictorial art so perfectly expresses the spirit of Shakespeare's wonderful image:—

—"And jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops."

More than once, in later years, Homer reverted to the camp life of the Adirondacks for his subjects but, to my mind, this first of the Adirondack series remains the finest of all. Indeed it was, for long, unmatched in its power by anything else he did. The year that it was painted, harking back to The Bright Side of eleven years earlier, he went to Petersburg, Virginia, to study the negroes again, and in that and the next year or two he painted The Visit from the Old Mistress, The Carnival, and several other subjects of Negro life; sober and excellent genre pictures, but certainly without the "Homeric" lift of his great successes. Then he is at Houghton Farm, trying again, and again failing, to find inspiration in the life of the American farmer; or at Gloucester and Annisquam, doing Schooners at Anchor and the like, but not yet feeling, or not rendering, the grandeur of the sea. His illustrations for "Harper's" ceased to appear a year before The Two Guides was painted; his occa-

sional book illustrations disappear after 1880; and in 1881 began that experience which was, in so many ways, decisive for him, his two years' stay among the fisherfolk of Tynemouth, near Newcastle, in England.

For even this most native of American artists was deeply influenced by a foreign sojourn, only it was a new view of nature that affected him, not a new inspiration from art. In this English fishing town his own peculiar range of subjects was revealed to him; here he first felt to the full the romance of the sea and of those who go down to the sea in ships. Here he first felt the majesty of the breakers, the irresistible might of the surf. Here he painted his first scenes of wreck and acquired that sense, which never left him, of the perils of the deep. And in Tynemouth, also, he found, or perfected, his means of expression. The work he did during his stay there, and after his return, is distinguished from that which went before not merely by a greater dramatic intensity and a broader and more profound feeling, but by striking alterations of style.

The first and most important of the effects of the Tynemouth visit upon Homer's style is the awakening in him of a sense of human beauty and, particularly, of the beauty of womanhood. Hitherto he had made some unconvincing attempts at beflounced ladies in bustles and chignons, and had drawn, with much more feeling and veracity, certain slim Yankee girls in limp skirts and gingham sunbonnets. Now he saw for the first time, in these robust English fish-

wives, a type of figure matching in its nobility and simplicity the elemental forces of nature; a type which lent itself admirably to his love of weight and solidity. Not from art, but from life, he learned the meaning of classic breadth and serenity, and his idea of figure drawing was transformed and enlarged. The memory of this type remains ever with him, and henceforth his women be they nearly pretty or frankly ugly, are, like his men, grandly and generously built.

It may well be that the large, slow gesture of these figures had some influence in the sudden development in Homer of a sense of the rhythm of line. Certainly it is in his great Tynemouth watercolors that the possession of this sense is decisively announced. He had always a strong feeling for spacing; from the beginning he put his subject rightly upon his paper or his canvas, and balanced his full and empty spaces with felicity. It is in such compositions as Inside the Bar and A Voice from the Cliffs that he adds to his pattern the element of flowing, leading and reduplicating lines, and becomes, what he remains, a master designer. A Voice from the Cliffs is as complete in its unified grouping of three figures as anything you shall find in art, and Homer himself could not improve upon it. Some four years later he took it up again, on a larger scale and in oils, when it became Hark! the Lark; but it lost as much in beauty by the absence of the great bounding-line of the cliff and, especially, by the omission of the boat and sail, which carries on so

happily the line of the outstretched arms, as it gained in height and dignity by the addition of the lower part of the figures. Both are admirable compositions, but the earlier seems to me the finer of the two.

Another important element of Homer's art that seems to have come from his studies on the shore of the North Sea is his feeling for the beauty of atmosphere, the enshrouding mystery of air that is charged with moisture, the poetry of fog and mist. His earlier works were painted in the clear, sharp air of his native New England and, for the most part, in full sunlight, and everything stands out in them hard edged and implacably revealed. In The Two Guides this glittering mountain clearness is exhilarating, but oftener it is rather distressing in its explicitness. At Tynemouth he learned to envelop his figures in fleecy softness and to place his landscape *in* the sky rather than in front of it. Something of the old hardness returns in one or two of his later pictures, usually where it intensifies the sentiment of the subject, and in his sub-tropical scenes he combines his old love of sunlight with that fullness of color which alone makes intensity of light bearable and beautiful; but his new sense of the enveloping atmosphere is a permanent acquisition, without which the creation of his great sea dramas would hardly have been possible.

These new and important elements of Homer's art, brought with them, of necessity, a new system of coloring and a new handling of material. The work he did during the two years he spent in Tyne-

mouth was entirely in watercolor, so that the changes brought about in his method of painting in oil must be looked for in the pictures painted immediately after his return to America. In these pictures the brown under-painting has entirely disappeared, the general tone becoming cool and silvery, while the paint is laid on directly with a free and full brush. It is henceforth modern painting that Homer practises, marked by nothing of the old timidity and thinness and showing, on the other hand, no search for technical niceties of any kind. He attacks his subject with forthright simplicity and sincerity, caring only for the truth of his representation and scarcely at all for the manner of it, and in this his art is characteristic of his time—of that latter end of the nineteenth century in which all the best of it was produced.

Thus, in matter and in manner, Homer has definitely found himself. After this time, though not all his work is of equal value, it is all mature work; all marked with the characteristics that his name calls up for us; all sealed with his seal. And though he is never to cease from experimenting, from going afield after new subjects and making new and surprising discoveries, yet he shows us only new aspects of one clear and decided personality. We have no longer to deal with foreshadowings of the Winslow Homer that is to be, but with varying manifestations of the Winslow Homer that is.

AS IF to signalize his arrival at the full maturity of his talent, Homer left New York in 1884, taking with him two unfinished canvases, The Life Line and Undertow, and settled himself at Prout's Neck, where he was farther removed than ever before from all extraneous artistic influences. There he made his home for the rest of his life, and there he painted all those pictures of his later years which have assured his fame.

Prout's Neck is a rocky promontory on the east side of Saco Bay in the town of Scarboro, Maine. What it is like no admirer of Homer's pictures needs to be told but, during much of his life there, it was not so lonely a place as one would be tempted to imagine. Arthur B. Homer had discovered the point in 1875 and regularly spent his summers there from that year. He was joined, later, by his father and his brother Charles, and Winslow had visited them there more than once before he decided to build a cottage and studio and make it his permanent residence. We are told that the Homers "bought up most of the land on the water front, and set out to develop the place systematically as a summer resort," with the result that, before the artist's death, there were sixty-seven houses on the neck and seven hotels. In such a place he could not lead quite the hermit-like life which legend has given him, but he was pretty effectually secluded from professional companionship, and

as he grew older fewer people of any sort were admitted to his studio. He lived alone, cooking for himself and, it is said, cooking extremely well, and employing only a man who came in each morning to "do the chores." He was fond of a certain amount of manual labor, building stone walls, dog houses and the like, and cultivating an old fashioned flower and vegetable garden. At one time he even attempted to grow and cure his own tobacco and to roll his own cigars.

There is nothing surprising in the fact that Homer, who was now becoming more and more definitely a painter of the sea, should have chosen for his summer home a place where he could live continually with his chosen subject; but almost any other man would have retained a studio in the city for those months when even he found the climate of Prout's Neck too rigorous and its solitude too absolute. Almost any other man would have taken some pains to maintain his relationship with his brother artists and to keep in touch with what they were doing. It is characteristic of Homer that when he retired to his sea-shore studio he shut the door after him. About 1888 he ceased to contribute voluntarily to the exhibitions or even to pay much attention to invitations to exhibit, and most of his pictures shown after that date were borrowed from owners or dealers. When Prout's Neck became uninhabitable he went south to Florida or the Bahamas and filled his portfolios with the wonderful watercolor sketches we know, and by March he was back again in Maine. Except for rare appear-

ances, one or two of them for the purpose of serving on the juries of important exhibitions, his fellows knew him no more; and many of his younger contemporaries, myself among the number, never so much as saw the man.

Homer's first voyage to Nassau and Cuba took place in the winter of 1885-6, though the two important oil paintings of West Indian subjects, The Gulf Stream and Search Light—Santiago, were not finished until 1899. During these later years, also, his trips to the Adirondacks were repeated, and his search for study combined with recreation took him into Canada, but the greater number of his pictures, exclusive, of course, of his deep-sea subjects, were painted not only in but of Prout's Neck, and the place is indelibly associated with his name.

The two pictures Homer took with him to Prout's Neck had been conceived in 1883 at Atlantic City, where he had gone especially to study the subject of The Life Line and where he witnessed the rescue from drowning which suggested Undertow, and they had been begun in his New York studio. The first was rapidly completed and exhibited in 1884, and the second was finished two years later. The series of works belonging entirely to his Prout's Neck period begins with the two great pictures of 1885 dealing with the lives of the Banks fishermen, The Fog Warning and The Herring Net. In 1886 Homer was fifty, and again the decade is marked off by a picture of especial importance. This time it is the noblest and

A VOICE FROM THE CLIFFS

(Water-Color)

COLLECTION OF DR. ALEXANDER C. HUMPHREYS

Signed and dated; Winslow Homer, 1883. Paper, 20¾ inches high, 29¾ inches wide.

THE WEST WIND

COLLECTION OF MR. SAMUEL UNTERMYER

Signed and dated; Winslow Homer, 1891. Canvas, 30½ inches high, 44¼ inches wide.

the quietest of all his figure pictures, Eight Bells, and just ten years later he rose again to something like the same level of serene power in The Lookout—All's Well. The last of his pictures of seafaring life was the extraordinary Kissing the Moon of 1904. The series of great pictures of rock and surf, in which the sea is itself the principal subject, the human figure being altogether absent or reduced to a minor role—the series which marks Homer as the greatest of marine painters—seems to have begun in 1890 with Sunlight on the Coast and the first Coast in Winter (there is another picture, of a year or two later, with the same title) and thereafter one or more such pictures can be placed in each year until 1897. After that date there are fewer of them, though the Early Morning after Storm at Sea is of 1902 and the last of them is the last picture he finished, the Driftwood of 1909. To name but the most important, the Luxembourg picture, A Summer Night, is of 1890; The West Wind is of 1891; High Cliff—Coast of Maine is of 1894; Cannon Rock and Northeaster are of 1895; and Maine Coast and Watching the Breakers of 1896.

There are those who object to the more dramatic of Homer's subject pictures, such as The Life Line and Undertow or the much later Gulf Stream for their "story-telling" quality. If, indeed, it is an artistic sin to be interested in life and death as well as in painting—to care for the significance of things as well as for their shapes and colors—then Homer must bear the odium of this sin with Michelangelo and Rembrandt

and almost all the greatest artists of the world. But, be it noted, it is never a trivial anecdote that Homer tells, but a story of big and simple issues and of powerful human appeal; and it is never a special tale, needing knowledge of something outside the canvas for its comprehension. He attempts no complicated narration but seizes upon a single moment, in which all that it is necessary to know of what has gone before or what is to come after is implicit, and he depicts that moment with the utmost directness and power, disencumbering it of all side issues and of all unimportant accessories. It is not whether an artist tells stories that is important, but what stories he tells and how he tells them, and I know no pictures that could better serve than these of Homer's as examples of the kind of stories that are suited to pictorial telling and of the manner in which such stories should be told.

It is only in the first of them that the illustrative interest at all overbears that which is more purely pictorial, and this is not because of too much interest in the story, but because the picture, as such, is not so perfect as those of a little later date. The concentration of attention on the fainting figure of the woman, the energy in the attitude of the sailor who carries her, the sense of rapid motion conveyed by the diagonal line of the rope and the blowing scarf and gown —these are not faults but virtues, and virtues of a high order. One could perhaps wish that the gown were not torn quite where it is, but this is a fault of illustration, not a fault of painting. It is because neither the

THE HERRING NET

COLLECTION OF MR. CHARLES W. GOULD

Canvas, 29½ inches high, 47½ inches wide. (Sight measurements.)

THE HERRING NET

COLLECTION OF MR. CHARLES W. GOULD

drawing nor the color are quite at Homer's highest level that the picture must take a second rank.

Undertow is quite as vivid and as gripping in the telling of its story as The Life Line, but its technical merits are far greater. The composition of the linked figures makes an admirable pattern, and the figure drawing is Homer's highest achievement in that line. Nowhere is his feeling for robust beauty so evident as in the almost classic proportions of the women clasped in each other's arms, and the only face clearly visible is like the face of the Greek Hypnos. It would be a great picture if it had no story at all—it is the greater because it has a thrilling story grandly told.

In this picture the artist's old delight in hard and brilliant sunlight is put to use in intensifying, by contrast, the tragic character of the subject, and it is so used again in the deeper tragedy of The Gulf Stream; but even this most dramatic of Homer's pictures, superbly illustrative as it is, is by no means an illustration only. The figure of the starving negro on the dismantled boat is small and carelessly drawn, but the play of line through the whole composition is magnificent, the color is richer and more powerful than in anything else its author did in oils, and there are passages of sheer rendering, like the distant ship and the rainbow spray from the tail of the nearer shark, which are inimitable.

But it is where the story is least explicit—where there seems no story, but only masterly painting—that Homer's genius for the telling of his story is most

wonderful. To paint a simple, every-day occurrence, a part of the routine of life, and by one's treatment of it to reveal its deeper implications and make manifest the dignity and the romance of the life of which it forms a part—that is what Millet did for the tillers of the soil and what Homer does for the fisherman and the sailor. Take, as an instance of this, The Fog Warning. Here is a halibut fisher rowing in with his catch and, as his dory rises on the back of the long wave, looking over his shoulder to make sure of the direction of the schooner to which he is returning. Nothing could be simpler than the attitude of the man, rowing steadily and easily, and there is no suggestion of tempest or wreck in this dark sea barely breaking into a white-cap here and there under the influence of a fresh breeze. But across the horizon lies a long bank of fog, and from it rise diagonally two or three ragged streamers which show that it is beginning to move toward us. It is enough, and one is as conscious of the most insidious and deadly of the fisherman's perils as of the matter-of-course way in which it is met as a part of the day's work.

In the greatest of salt sea epics, Eight Bells, there is not even so much suggestion of danger. Here is a cloudy sky through which the sun breaks dimly, casting a gleam upon a flat and tumbled sea, and against it two or three lines of cordage show that the ship rides on an even keel. Upon the level deck stand two men in oilskins, the skipper and his mate, occupied with the most regularly recurring of their daily tasks, the

taking of the noonday observation. They do it as a maid would wash the dishes or as a farmer would hoe his corn, yet one is made to feel to the full the importance of this daily act upon which the safety of the ship depends. Exactly in the routine nature of the business seems to lie a great part of its significance, and the whole life of the sailor is included in it.

It is in reality this same gift of story telling—this faculty of dwelling on the essentials of the subject and of excluding or subordinating less important things—that makes Homer's surf pictures the triumphs they are. Whistler could make The Blue Wave, or some of his late sea pieces, bits of pure decoration. Homer, also, was not insensible to this decorative beauty of the sea, as he has shown now and again, but generally he seizes upon the weight and bulk of water, upon the battering and rending power of the wave, as upon the things essential to be told, and these things he depicts as no one else has ever done. There has never been any difference of opinion about this latest phase of Homer's art, and his pure marines are universally accepted as the greatest ever painted. Yet I think the kind of genius that created them is present in even fuller measure in the finest of his figure pictures.

After 1900 Homer's powers may be said to have been on the decline. He was still to do things that we should be sorry to lose, but his greatest pictures were painted, and his inspirations came more rarely. He had never allowed himself to work by formulae, and he could not go on painting from sheer inertia.

He had always been dependent upon the immediate suggestion of nature or on the vivified memory of such suggestion, and was apt to feel, after each period of exhausting creation, that there were no more inspirations to come, and that his work was done. As early as 1893, just after the recipt of that gold medal of the Columbian Exposition which was the first of those honors which fell thickly upon his declining years, he wrote: "At present and for some time past I see no reason why I should paint any pictures." These moments of lassitude—one can hardly call it despondency, for he was fully conscious of the value of his work—became more frequent as he grew older, and more than once he declared his intention of painting no more. In 1907, a month or two before he finished in two hours of strenuous work from nature that Early Morning after Storm, begun two years earlier, which seems to strike a new note of beauty in his work, he wrote to Miss Leila Mechlin: "Perhaps you think I am still painting and interested in art. *That is a mistake.* I care nothing for art. I no longer paint. I do not wish to see my name in print again."

The inspirations always returned and he always began again to paint. Even after his first serious illness, in 1908, an illness which made him, for a time, nearly blind and nearly helpless, he would stay in his brother's house for only two weeks. Leaving a note behind him he departed, early one morning, to resume work in his studio.

He had, however, little more to do there. He

HOUND AND HUNTER

COLLECTION OF MR. LOUIS ETTLINGER

Signed and dated; Winslow Homer, 1892. Canvas, 28 inches high, 47½ inches wide.

HIGH CLIFF, COAST OF MAINE

NATIONAL GALLERY, WASHINGTON, D. C.

EVANS COLLECTION

Signed and dated; Homer, 1894. Canvas, 30 inches high, 37½ inches wide.


HOMER
'94

partly recovered from this first illness, and in 1909 he painted two or three canvases which have all his old originality and unexpectedness if not all his old power. The next summer he began to fail visibly, but maintained that he was "all right" and wanted nothing but to be left alone. When at last he had to take to his bed he refused to be moved from his own house, and there, where all his greatest work had been done, he died on the twenty-ninth day of September, 1910.

PART FOUR

SO far as we can judge by his effect upon us, his contemporaries, and without waiting for the verdict of posterity, Winslow Homer was unquestionably a great artist. He has given us pleasures and sensations different in kind from those which we have received from other artists of his time and, perhaps, superior to them in degree. He has shown us things which, without his eyes, we should not have seen and impressed us with truths which, but for him, we should not have felt. He has stirred us with tragic emotion or, in the representation of common everyday incidents, has revealed to us the innate nobility of the simple and hardy lives of hunters, fishers and seafarers. Finally, he has realized for us, as no other artist of any time has done, the power and the grandeur of the elemental forces of nature, and has dramatized for us the conflict of water, earth and air. His genius has been felt alike by artist, by critic and by

layman, and it has been acknowledged almost as fully by that contemporary posterity, intelligent foreign opinion, as by the universal assent of his countrymen. No other American painter of his generation has been so widely recognized except that one who was, in temper and accomplishments, almost his exact antithesis, James McNeill Whistler.

For, surely, no greatly successful artist ever had less care than Homer for those decorative and æsthetic qualities which Whistler proclaimed, in theory and by his practise, the whole of art. There is nothing gracious or insinuating, hardly, even, anything reticent or mysterious, about the art of Homer. His pictures will not hang comfortably on a wall or invite you discreetly to the contemplation of gradually unfolding beauties. They speak with the voice of a trumpet and, whether they exhilarate or annoy you, you cannot neglect them. They have none of the amenities of the drawingroom, and you might almost as well let the sea itself into your house as one of Homer's transcripts of it. Even in a great gallery they often seem too strident, too unmitigated, too crude. If they do not conquer you they surprise and disconcert you.

But this asperity has no kinship with the vulgar noisiness of those painters who, thinking of the conflict of the exhibitions, determine to outshout their fellows that they may be heard. Homer is not thinking of exhibitions, to which he seldom cared to send, any more than he is thinking of the final destination

of his picture on someone's walls. He is not thinking of an audience at all, but only of the thing he has seen and of his effort to render it truthfully. He places himself in direct competition with nature, and if his work seems harsh or violent it has become so in the effort to match nature's strength with his own. He painted directly from the object whenever that was possible, and it was often possible to him when it might not be so to another. He painted his All's Well entirely by moonlight, never touching it by day or working over it in the studio. He had a portable painting house constructed, that he might work from nature in the bitterest weather, and he used to hang a canvas on the balcony of his studio, in the open air, and study it from a distance "with reference solely," as he said, "to its simple and absolute truth." This habit of fighting nature on her own terms he carried into work that must necessarily be done from memory, and his studio pictures show the same pitting of his powers against those of nature as do his direct transcripts from the thing before him. He knew quite well that pictures so painted could not be properly seen on the walls of a house or gallery, and he once advised a friend to look at one of his canvases, then in a dealer's window, from the opposite corner, diagonally across the street.

And if Homer has nothing of Whistler's æstheticism he has almost as little of Inness's passion or of Homer Martin's reverie. Compared to such men he is quite impersonal. He has no lyrical fervor; makes

no attempt to express his own emotion or his own mood. His is the objective attitude of the dramatist, and however much nature may stimulate or excite him, it is her passion and her mood that he is trying to render, not his own. He is too obviously capable of such excitement, and too dependent upon it for his best results, to be called a cool observer—let us rather call him an exalted observer; but an observer and a recorder of things observed he essentially is. He is a kind of flaming realist—a burning devotee of the actual.

Being such an observer he was always making the most unexpected observations, and painting things that were not only unpainted till then but, apparently, unseen by anyone else. His watercolor sketches, in which he set down with astonishing succintness and rapidity the things he saw, are a vast repertory of such surprises; but even in his more deeply considered and long wrought pictures he is constantly doing things of a disturbing originality—painting aspects of nature which another, if he had seen them, would consider unpaintable. For Homer is afraid of nothing and trusts his own perceptions absolutely, having no notion of traditions that must not be violated or of limits that cannot be overstepped. That he has seen a thing, and that it interested him, is reason enough for trying to paint it. Whether he fails or succeeds is hardly his affair—whether the result is pleasing or the reverse is nothing to him—"I saw it so; there it is."—The next time it will be a new observation, and

A SUMMER NIGHT

THE LUXEMBOURG, PARIS

Signed and dated; Homer, 1890.

A SUMMER NIGHT

THE LUXEMBOURG, PARIS

Signed and Dated Paris 1890.

until there is a new observation, he will paint no more.

Many men have sat by a camp fire at night and have enjoyed, in a dreamy way, watching the long curves of light cut into the blue darkness by the ascending sparks. Who but Homer would have made them not an accessory but the principle subject of a picture? Who but Homer has seen or painted such a thing as that flock of ravenous crows, starved by the long winter, hunting a live fox through the heavy snow which retards his superior speed—one of the most superb animal pictures in the world, yet produced by an artist who has painted no other? He wishes to paint the sea by night, the foam of breakers dark against the glittering wake of the moon. Who else would not have feared to disturb the serenity of nature by the presence of figures, or would have dared more, at most, than the black, almost formless, group of silent watchers on the rocks? Homer cuts his foreground with the long, straight line of the platform of a summer cottage or hotel, and places on it, illumined by artificial light and so large as to become almost the principal subject of the picture, two girls waltzing gether. They were there; he saw them and painted them so, and he triumphs. The girls and the sea dance together, and the very spirit of A Summer Night is fixed upon the canvas. Everyone has seen the moon rise at sunset, and many men must have seen the figures in a boat when the boat itself was hidden in the trough of the sea. If any painter saw it, before Homer painted his Kissing the Moon, he as-

suredly thought the subject impossible. Homer admits no impossibilities, and having seen it he painted it, the three heads red against the gray-green sea and the moon like a fourth in the group, only a touch and a sweep of light on the shaft of an oar to indicate that there is anything to support these solid figures in their strange position. You gasp, once, at the unexpectedness of the impression, and then accept it as obvious truth.

These surprise pictures are not always, or necessarily, Homer's best; some of his greatest successes are attained when dealing with subjects that anyone might have chosen. But in his treatment of such subjects there is always the sense of new and personal vision; the things have not been painted by him because others had painted them, but rather in spite of that fact. He has seen them afresh for himself, and he does not choose to be deterred from painting them because others have seen them also. In a hundred little things you will have the evidence of the lucidity, the acuity and the originality of his observation. The unexpectedness is merely transferred from the whole to the details.

Such being the observer, the recorder of observations spares no pains to make his record as truthful as possible. He will not trust his memory or his notes any farther than he must. He will produce as nearly as possible the conditions of his original observation, that the details may be filled in with his eye upon the object; and he will do this not because his memory is

weak, but rather because it is so strong that he is sure not to lose sight of his original impression while verifying the details by renewed experiment. The studio in the old University Building in Washington Square, which he occupied from 1861 to 1884, was a room in the tower with a door opening upon the flat roof of the main building where he could pose his models beneath the sky. Most artists of his time painted, as most artists still do, direct from the model; and many of them would have been glad of his opportunity to paint in the open air. Not many, perhaps, would have pushed the love of exactitude so far as he did when he painted the figures of his Undertow from models kept wet by continual dousing with buckets of water kept at hand for the purpose. This reminds one of some of Meissonier's expedients for securing accuracy; the result was different because Homer had a far firmer grasp of the total effect than Meissonier ever possessed, and did not allow his pursuit of minor facts to obscure his vision of the essential ones.

There are other tales of his scrupulousness, such as his propping up the dory of The Fog Warning, at the necessary angle, against a sand dune on the beach and posing his fisherman model in it; or his modelling in clay the ship's bell of All's Well when he could not find one to his mind in the junk shops of Boston; but more impressive are the evidences of another kind of scruple, an anxiety for exactitude of effect which reminds one more of Monet than of Meissonier. He often waited weeks and months for just the effect he

wanted, and seemed to his intimates unreasonably idle, because he could not go on with the picture he was interested in and could paint nothing else until that was completed. Shooting the Rapids, now in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, was begun in 1904, and Homer expected to complete it easily as he had made many studies for it; but he could not satisfy himself without another trip to the Upper Saguenay to restudy it from nature, and it remained unfinished at the time of his death. The Early Morning after Storm at Sea was two years on his easel and, during that time, was the subject of a rather voluminous correspondence with the dealers who had ordered it. Homer's excuse for delay is always that he must "have a crack at it out of doors," as he is not satisfied to work from his original study. In March of 1902 he writes: "After waiting a full year, looking out every day for it—I got the light and the sea that I wanted; but as it was very cold I had to paint out of my window, and I was a little too far away—it is not good enough yet, and I must have another painting from nature on it." Finally, seven months later, he writes again: "The long looked for day arrived, and from 6 to 8 o'clock A. M. I painted from nature—finishing it,—making the fourth painting on this canvas of two hours each."

To Homer's own consciousness this acuteness of perception and this thorough and painstaking realization were all there was to his art. He had no patience with theories and would seldom talk about painting

THE FOX HUNT

THE PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

Signed and dated; Homer, 1893. Canvas, 38¼ inches high, 68¼ inches wide.

at all. A fellow artist, since distinguished as a mural painter, once tried to express his admiration for the composition of line and space in Homer's pictures, but he found the master blankly unresponsive and inclined to deny the existence of any such qualities either in his own work or elsewhere—professing, indeed, not to know what was meant by the language employed. This can hardly have been affectation in him—one cannot conceive Homer as affected in anything. He seems honestly to have believed that it is only necessary to know how to see and, above all, to know a good thing when one sees it, and then to copy the thing seen as accurately as possible. He believed that he altered nothing and said to Mr. John W. Beatty: "When I have selected a thing carefully, I paint it exactly as it appears." It is an illusion shared by other painters of our day, and one can see how Homer might have cherished it with regard to his marines—how, having chosen well, he might not consciously change so much as the line of a rock crest or the color of the shadow under the top of a wave. It is more difficult to see how he could have been unaware of the powers of arrangement and interpretation implied in the creation of his figure pictures, but he seems to have been so. He was not averse, upon occasion, from mentioning the merits of his work, but it is always accuracy of observation and of record that he praises; and if we accept his own estimate of himself it is as a gifted reporter that we shall think of him, hardly as a creator.

IT IS, of course, quite impossible to accept such an estimate as final. Extraordinary as are Homer's powers of observation and of record, such powers will not, alone, account for the effects he produced. A veracious reporter he undoubtedly was, but he must have been something more and other than a reporter however veracious. His great pictures are either intensely dramatic or grandly epic, and neither dramatic intensity nor epic serenity were ever attained by veracity alone. They are attainable, in pictorial as in literary art, only by style. If the effects are great the art must be great in proportion; if the effects are vivid the style must be keen and clear; if they are noble the style must be elevated. Consciously or unconsciously, Winslow Homer was an artist, and it becomes a matter of interest to examine the elements of his pictorial style, to test their weakness or strength, to determine, if possible, by what means his results are attained. Beginning with the least important of these elements let us study his technical handling of his material, his employment of the medium of oil painting; then his treatment of light and color; then his draughtmanship, his knowledge of and feeling for significant form; finally, reaching the most fundamental of artistic qualities, let us consider his composition and the nature of the basic design to which the other elements of his pictures are added or out of which they grow.

While felicity in the handling of material is the least important of artistic qualities it is by no means without importance. Without his extraordinary virtuosity Frans Hals would be a nearly negligible painter, and the loss of his exquisite treatment of material would considerably diminish the rank of even so great a master as Titian. Or, to take a more modern instance, think how much of Corot we should lose with the loss of his lovely surfaces and his admirably flowing touch. Homer's technical handling of oil paint is entirely without charm, and it is abundantly evident that he triumphs not through but in spite of it. Mr. Beatty has said, meaning it for praise: "No one, I think, was ever heard to talk about Homer's manner of painting, or about his technical skill, as of special importance." He is so far right that no one has found Homer's technic, in the limited sense of the word, a reason for liking or admiring his paintings, but many have found it a reason for disliking them; and to some of the artist's most sincere admirers his technical limitations remain a stumbling block in the way of their free enjoyment of his great qualities. In his early work his handling is hard, dry and timid. Later it attains to force and directness, and sometimes to great skill, but never to beauty. It is perhaps at its best in such a picture as The West Wind, where the sureness of touch and economy of means are striking and, to some degree, enjoyable. The picture looks as if it had been painted in a few hours, without a wasted stroke of the brush, and its workmanlike directness

communicates a certain exhilaration. But this impression of spontaneity, which is the highest pleasure Homer's handling is capable of giving, vanishes with further labor, and there is nothing to take its place. His surfaces become wooden or wooly, his handling grows labored and harsh and unpleasing. At best his method is a serviceable tool; at less than its best it is a hindrance to his expression, like a bad handwriting, which one must become accustomed to and forget before one can enjoy the thing written.

If Homer's color is not, like his workmanship, a positive injury to his expression it seldom reaches the point of being a positive aid to it, at least in those great paintings which are the most profound expressions of his genius. In both color and handling his slighter sketches in watercolor reach a standard of excellence he was unable to attain in the more difficult medium. Many of his marines are little more than black and white in essential construction, and are almost as effective in a good photograph as in the original. In The West Wind, for instance, the whole of the land and the figure that stands upon it are of a nearly uniform brown, while the sky is an opaque gray, of very little quality, brought down to the edge of the earth in one painting. Across this the white of the breakers is struck with a few frank, strong touches. The contrast of brown and gray, of transparent and opaque, is pleasant; but the whole expression of the picture is in its shapes and its values; its color, as color, is nearly negligible. This is an extreme case, yet in most of

THE LOOKOUT—ALL'S WELL

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, MASS.

Signed and dated; Homer, 1896. Canvas, 42 inches high, 30 inches wide.

THE LOOKOUT—ALL'S WELL

THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, MASS.

Signal and Lateral Planes. Cruiser 71 Active Length, 30 inches scale.

the coast scenes the color is really of little more importance, though the perfect notation of degrees of dark and light often gives an illusion of color which is not actually present. In some of the figure pictures color is carried further. In The Herring Net and Eight Bells the grays of sky and water are much more subtly modulated, the dull yellows of the sailors' oilskins are very true and delicate, and, in the former picture, the rainbow gleams of the fish in the net are a fascinating element in the total effect. Once or twice, where the lowered key of moonlight has helped him —in All's Well" for example—Homer comes near that unification of all the separate notes of a picture by one prevailing hue which we know as tone, and at least once, in The Gulf Stream, he reaches towards a fully orchestrated harmony, the blues, especially, in that picture, being superbly rich and varied.

But to understand how far Homer's color, even in these examples, is from that of the true colorists, we have only to compare his work with that of such contemporaries and compatriots as Inness and Martin. Inness's harmonies are full, vibrant, rich, including, on occasion, both extremities of the scale. Martin plays a more delicate flute music, full of tender modulations and tremulous sweetness. But in both the color is the very texture of the work which could not exist without it. With Homer the color, at its best, is an agreeable ornament which he can very well dispense with.

And if Homer was never extraordinarily sensitive

to color, there is some evidence that, in his later days, he became partially color-blind. This evidence first appears, curiously enough, in the richest piece of full color he produced in oils, The Gulf Stream. That picture was a long time in his studio, and he may well have added the unexplained and unrelated touch of pure scarlet on the stern of the boat at a time when his sight was beginning to fail. Certainly the scarlet is so vivid, and so without visible reason or connection with other things, as to suggest that he did not see it as we do, and that his eye was growing insensitive to red. In his latest work this scarlet spot recurs more than once, and is the more startling from its appearance in connection with a coldness and harshness of general tone that would of itself suggest a state akin to color blindness.

There can, on the other hand, be no doubt whatever of the strength of Homer's native gift for form and for expressive line. Almost from his childhood he made drawings which have the incisive truth, in attitude and expression of the sketches of a Charles Keene, and, after his Tynemouth studies, his figures, especially of women, attain a grandeur and nobility of type which makes them almost worthy to be compared with the majestic figures of Millet. In no other part of his art does he show so much sense of beauty as in some of these grave and simple figures with their ample forms, their slow gesture, their quiet and unforced dignity of bearing. At its highest level his drawing of the male figure is, if less beautiful, almost

equally impressive; and his grasp of attitude is almost infallible. Whatever his people are doing they do rightly and naturally, with the exact amount of effort necessary, neither more nor less, and with an entire absence of artificial posing. Infallible, also is his sense of bulk and weight. His figures are always three-dimensional, and always firmly planted on their feet —they occupy a definite amount of space, and yield to, or resist, a definite amount of gravitation or of external force.

These are among the greatest gifts of the figure draughtsman, and there can be little doubt that Homer had the natural qualifications for a draughtsman of the first order. But no man, whatever his natural gifts, ever mastered the structure of the human figure without a prolonged investigation of that figure disembarrassed from the disguise of clothing. A profound and intense study of the nude is indispensable to the mastery of its secrets, and for such study Homer had little opportunity and less inclination. He received no training from others and, in the confidence of his strength, failed to appreciate the necessity of giving it to himself; and his figures, though right in bulk and attitude, are often almost structureless. This lack of structure is seldom so painfully apparent as in the rounded pudginess, like that of an inflated bladder, of the woman in The Life Line, but even in his best figures there are regretable lapses and passages of emptiness. The arms of the three girls in A Voice from the Cliffs are beautifully and naturally

arranged, but they are not what a trained draughtsman could call arms—there are no bones or muscles under the skin—and even the figures in Undertow, his most strenuous and most successful piece of figure drawing, are not impeccable, not without regions of woodenness or puffiness.

Perhaps wisely, he never again made such an effort—for at fifty, if ever, it is time to use the acquirements one has rather than to strive for new ones—and his figure drawing relapses, in his later work, into summary indications, sufficient for his purpose but slighter and slighter in structure.

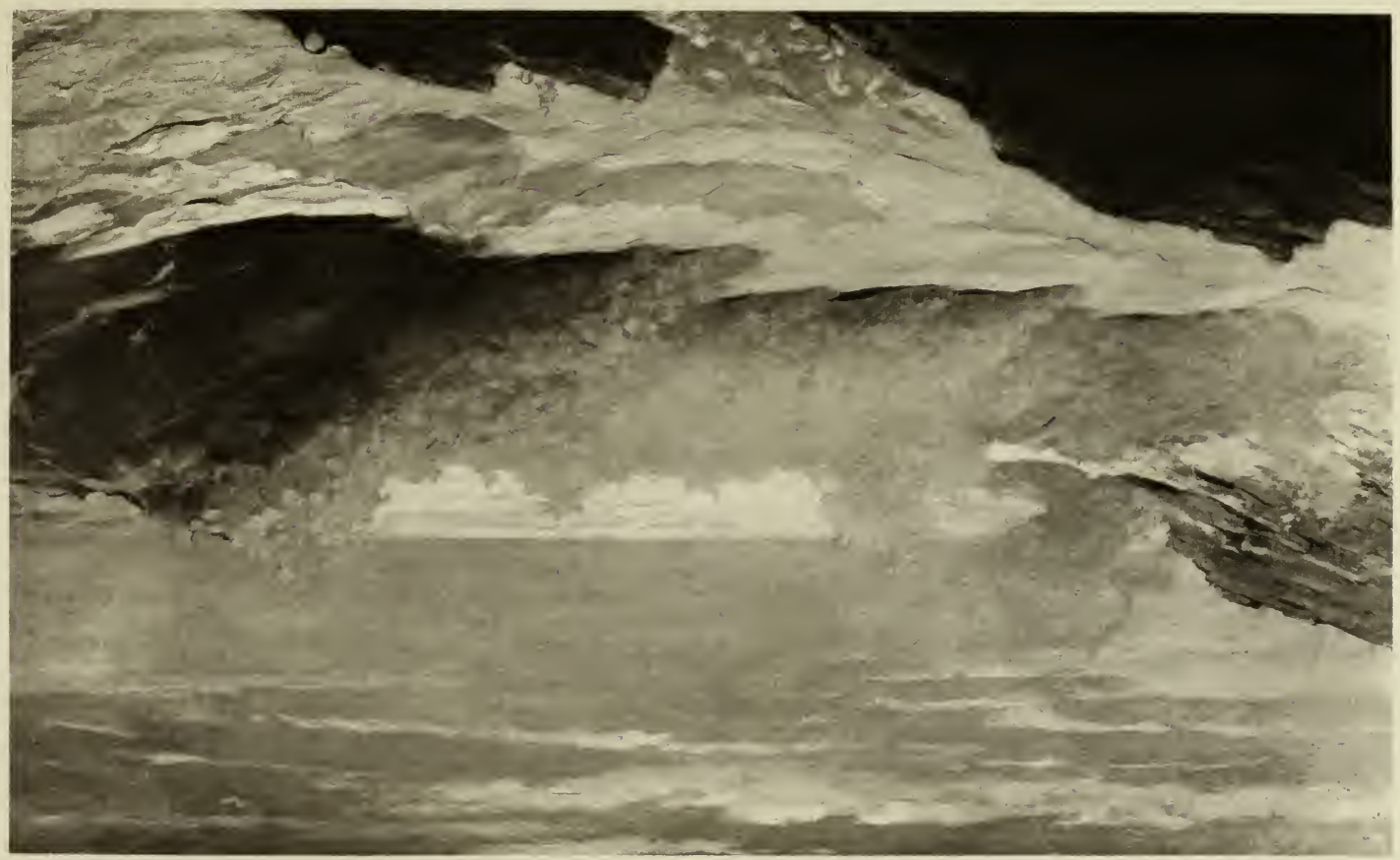
But if Homer had neither the right kind nor the right amount of training for the figure draughtsman, he had the only right and true training for the draughtsman of rocks and waves, and no one has ever drawn them better. Constant observation had taught him all that it is needful to know of their forms, and had fully supplemented his natural gifts. No one has so felt and expressed the solid resistance of rock, the vast bulk and hammering weight of water, the rush and movement of wave and wind. It is the suggestion of weight and movement that makes his figure drawing impressive in spite of its lapses—it is in the suggestion of weight and movement that his drawing of land and sea is unmatched and unsurpassable.

A sense of weight and of movement is, however, much more a matter of design—of the composition of line—than of drawing in the usual meaning of that word. Indeed, the sense of movement can be con-

EARLY MORNING AFTER STORM AT SEA
COLLECTION OF MR. W. K. BIXBY

EARLY MORNING AFTER STORM AT SEA

COLLECTION OF MR. W. K. BIXBY



veyed by nothing else but composition. The most accurately drawn figure of man or horse or bird will refuse to move unless its lines, and the lines of surrounding objects, are so arranged as to compel the eye of the spectator to follow the direction of the desired movement. It is by composition, therefore, that Homer obtains his effects of movement, and it is by composition that he obtains all his great effects. From the very first he shows some of the qualities of a master designer; he always places his subject rightly within the rectangle of his border, he always balances felicitously his filled and empty spaces; and as his power of observation becomes more and more acute his power of design keeps pace with it, his most original observations being infallibly embodied in equally original designs.

An admirable instance of the expressiveness of Homer's composition, at a comparatively early date, is the little watercolor of Berry Pickers of 1873. At first sight it is a simple transcript from nature, with little style in either the drawing or the color, yet it is full of a charm difficult to account for. And then one notices that the lines of all the subordinate figures lead straight to the head of the taller girl, standing alone on the left, and that she has a blowing ribbon on her hat. The line of that ribbon takes possession of the eye, which is carried by it, and by the clouds in the sky, straight across the picture to the other end where, so small as to be otherwise unnoticeable, a singing bird sits upon the branch of a bare shrub. By that sub-

tle bit of arrangement the air has been filled not only with sun and breeze but with music, and the expression of the summer morning is complete. That Homer himself may have been unaware of what he had done is suggested by the fact that when he reproduced this composition, reversed by the engraver, in "Harper's Weekly" he utterly spoiled it by the introduction of another figure, at what has become the left, which disturbs the balance and attracts the eye away from the bird. Whether the change was made to please the publishers, or for some other reason, the music has gone and the picture is dead.

Now look at a quite late picture, The Search Light of 1899. It is almost totally without color, and has not even that approach to unity of tone which moonlight sometimes enabled Homer to attain. In handling it is poor and harsh, and there are no objects in it which require more of the draughtsman than a fairly correct eye for the sizes and shapes of things. Yet the picture is grandly impressive. How is this impressiveness secured? It can be by nothing but composition, and by composition at its simplest. The perfect balancing of two or three masses, the perfect coördination of a few straight lines and a few segments of circles, and the thing is done—a great picture is created out of nothing and with almost no aid from any other element of the art of painting than this all important one of design.

It is always so with Homer. The gravity, the sense of serious import, the feeling that the action in hand is

one of great and permanent interest, not a trivial occupation of the moment, is given to Eight Bells by the masterly use of a few verticals and horizontals. The rush and swoop of The West Wind is a matter of a few sweeping and reduplicating curves. The patterns of The Fox Hunt and All's Well are as astonishingly fresh and unexpected as the observations they contain and control.

Perhaps the greatest test of a designer is his use of little things to produce unexpectedly great effects, and a remarkable instance of this is to be found in The Gulf Stream. Remove the trailing ropes from the bow of the tubby boat and its helpless sliding into the trough of the sea will be checked, the ghastly gliding of the sharks will be arrested, and the fine wave drawing will not avail to keep the picture alive and moving.

In Homer's mastery of design we have a quality which is, if not precisely decorative, preëminently monumental; a quality which explains the desire, once expressed to me by La Farge, that Homer might be given a commission for a great mural painting; a quality which makes one regret the loss of the mural decorations he actually undertook for Harper and Brothers. In this mastery of design we have, undoubtedly, that which gives Homer his authoritative and magisterial utterance; that which constitutes him a creator, that which transforms him from an acute observer and a brilliant reporter into a great and original artist. A poor technician, an unequal colorist, a powerful but untrained draughtsman, his faults might

almost overbear his merits were he not a designer of the first rank. Because he is a designer of the first rank he is fairly certain to be permanently reckoned a master.

PART SIX

IN that chapter of his "Your United States" which deals with art in America Mr. Arnold Bennett tells us that one of his reasons for coming to this country was his desire of seeing the pictures of Winslow Homer, that when he saw them he did not like them, but that, coming upon an exhibition of Homer's watercolors, he was forced to reconsider his judgment. He found "these summary and highly distinguished sketches" to be beautiful, thrilling and "clearly the productions of a master." One may guess that Mr. Bennett did not see the best of Homer's pictures in oil as, assuredly, he did not see much else in American art that might, or should, have interested him; but it is quite possible that further study would have left him of the same opinion, and that he would still have considered the watercolors superior to the oils. If he did so he would only be in line with a great deal of modern opinion which prefers the immediacy and vividness of the sketch to the ponderation of the considered picture, and which rates the multitude of Millet's drawings and pastels higher than The Gleaners or the noble Woman with Buckets in the Vanderbilt collection. Indeed, there is better reason for such a preference in the case of Homer than in that

of Millet, for Millet was, what Homer never quite became, a master of oil painting, and could give a richness of color and a beauty of material to his pictures which Homer was quite incapable of emulating.

Homer's earlier watercolors are neat, careful, rather tinted than colored, but pleasanter and far more skillful than the oil paintings of the same period. The transparency of the washes and the deft decisiveness of touch give them a charm and sparkle proper to the medium. They are already the production of a more competent workman than their author ever became in the sister art. The Tynemouth series, not all of which were painted in Tynemouth, for some of them are dated several years after the painter's return to America, differ from both the earlier and later work in being complete pictures, carefully composed and elaborately wrought. As such one thinks of them in their place among the other compositions of their creator, not with the rapid and astonishing notes and sketches of his later years. It was a collection of these later sketches that Bennett saw and admired. It was by a collection of such sketches that Homer chose to be represented at the Pan-American Exposition of 1901. It is by these sketches that many artists and many critics of today would consider Homer most likely to be remembered.

There must be reasons, more or less valid, for a preference so vividly felt—felt, at times, by Homer himself—for these watercolors over his more elaborate works in oil, and one of these reasons I have

already touched upon; it is Homer's extraordinary technical mastery of the medium. If, from the first, he painted better in watercolors than he was ever able to do in oils, it may be said that, in the end, he painted better in watercolors—with more virtuosity of hand, more sense of the right use of the material, more decisive mastery of its proper resources—than almost any modern has been able to do in oils. One must go back to Rubens or Hals for a parallel, in oil painting, to Homer's prodigious skill in watercolor, and perhaps to the Venetians for anything so perfectly right in its technical manner. His felicity and rapidity of handling is a delight, and to see the way, for instance, in which all the complicated forms and foreshortenings of the head of a palm tree are given in a few instantaneous touches, each touch of a shape one would hardly have thought of, yet each indisputably right in character, is to have a new revelation of the magical power of sheer workmanship. Even Sargent's stupendous cleverness in watercolor is not more wonderful, though Sargent seems to be thinking a little of the brilliancy of his method, whereas Homer is thinking, single-mindedly, of the object or the effect to be rendered, and is clever only because he is sure of what he wants to do and seizes instinctively on the nearest way of doing it.

And this swiftness and certainty of hand is delightful not merely for its own sake but because it insures the greatest purity and beauty of the material. The highest perfection of oil painting depends upon com-

plicated processes which are almost impossible to the painter from nature, impatient to set down his observations while they are immanent to his mind; and these processes our modern painters have, for the most part, forgotten. The perfection of watercolor depends, largely, upon directness and rapidity. The material is never so beautiful as when it is washed in at once, with as little disturbance by reworking as may be, the white paper everywhere clear and luminous beneath and between the washes. It is the ideal material for rapid sketching from nature because the sketcher, instead of sacrificing technical beauty to directness of expression, gains greater beauty with every increase of speed. Therefore, for the fastidious in technical matters, Homer's sudden notations of things observed have an extraordinary charm which comes of the perfect harmony between the end sought and the means employed. The more his mind is fixed upon the rendering of his impression and the less he thinks of his material the more beautiful his material becomes. The accuracy of his observation, the rapidity of his execution and the perfection of his technic increase together, and reach their highest value at the same moment. The one little square of paper becomes a true record of the appearance of nature, an amazing bit of sleight of hand, and a piece of perfect material beauty; it gives you three kinds of pleasure, intimately related and united, and each in the highest degree.

Following from this technical superiority and

closely connected with it is the second, and more important, superiority of Homer's watercolors; they are vastly more beautiful in color than are the best of his oil paintings. Oil painting, in its perfection, is capable of a depth and splendor of color which watercolor painting can never equal, but oil painting as it is generally practised today, and as Homer practised it, is relatively poor and opaque in color, muddy and chalky or brown and heavy. Almost any watercolor painter, if he will refrain from emulating the solidity of oil paint and eschew the use of Chinese white, can attain a purity and brilliancy of tone which is very rare in modern oil painting. A master of the material, like Homer, capable of striking in a hue with its full intensity at once, with just the gradations and modulations he wishes it to have, can make every particle of his color sing, and can reach effects either of force or tenderness that are impossible to the flounderers in that pasty mass which modern oil painting too readily becomes.

Of course the use of a particular method does not radically alter the nature of the man who employs it, and so, although Homer's color is far better in these watercolor sketches than in his oils, he does not, even in them, become, in the full sense of the words, a true colorist. He is never one of those artists for whom color is the supreme and necessary means of expression. His art does not live in color and by color as the art of a musician exists in and by musical sounds; but, aided by the beauty and transparency of the material,

he shows himself in his watercolors, as he seldom does in oils, an acute and daring observer and recorder of the colors of nature. He is not expressing deep emotions in color, writing lyrics or composing symphonies; he is only telling you what he has seen. But he has seen all sorts of surprising things, sometimes beautiful, sometimes strange, often violent and almost savage, and he tells of them with a perfect impartiality and in a language of the utmost perspicuity and vigor. The intense blue of a tropic sea, the red and black of a stormy sunset, the spots on the gleaming sides of a leaping trout, the deep plumage of a wild duck—all these things are set down at a white heat, swiftly, sharply, decisively, before the impression has faded, and they are set down, therefore, with the greatest truth, the greatest vividness, the greatest intensity.

It is, finally, this immediacy of impression, this instantaneousness of vision, even more than the beauty of technic or the purity of color which are its accompaniments, that is in itself the great charm of Homer's watercolors. And the diversity and multiplicity of his observations are as remarkable as their freshness and their truth. Apparently there is nothing he has not seen and painted at one time or another. Figures, landscapes, sea, boats, architecture, still life, the shadow of the North Woods or the pitiless southern sun; about all these things—about anything, from a dashing cataract to a lemon on a plate—he can tell you something new and unexpected. He is one of the greatest observers that ever lived, and in these sketch-

es you may watch him at his work, catch his excitement at the discovery of some new effect or some hitherto unnoticed truth, see what he saw and feel what he felt, with the least possible impediment between his mind and yours. No wonder Arnold Bennett found such sketches thrilling. You are reading the note books of a sort of reporter *in excelsis* of nature's doings, and you are delighted with his accuracy, astonished at his variety, overwhelmed by his prodigal abundance. If you share the modern love for facts and have anything of the modern carelessness of art you will ask for nothing more, and will prefer such notes to any possible work of art that might be constructed from them.

If, on the other hand, you are one who feels that a complete work of art is something different from and more than a sketch, you may still enjoy these sketches intensely while asking for your fullest satisfaction something more definitely designed and more deeply considered. With all their brilliancy these amazing notes are only notes, and Homer was capable of something more than notes. Hundreds of these sketches were set down for their own sake and never referred to again. Many of the oil pictures seem to have had no specific preparation, but to have been begun directly from nature or from a memory enriched by the constant study of nature. But now and then one can identify the original watercolor sketch and the picture painted from it, and then one can see clearly the defects which are an inevitable accompaniment

of the merits of such sketching. You cannot have at the same time, and in the same work, the merits of the sketch and of the picture; and if the picture is inferior in spontaneity to the sketch it is as manifestly superior to it in concentration and power. In the Memorial Exhibition of Homer's works, held at the Metropolitan Museum in 1911, the original watercolor of Hound and Hunter and the final painting of the same subject hung together, and the comparison of them was instructive. At first sight the watercolor was the more taking. It is exhilarating in the fresh sparkle of its handling, and the color, if not rich or intense, is clear and cool. The oil picture seemed heavy and snuffy by contrast and, as mere painting, rather uninteresting. Yet the oil picture is almost inexplicably impressive and remains firmly fixed in one's memory while the watercolor has faded from it. The difference is in countless little changes which have transformed a bit of reporting into a masterly design. Everything has been so adjusted and so definitely fitted into its place that the result is that sense of permanence and of unalterableness which is perhaps the greatest feeling a work of art can produce.

It is this relative lack of design which makes the watercolor sketches of Homer, perfect though they are as sketches, inferior to his great compositions in oil. They are marvelous, they are admirable, they are distinguished, but they are sketches. They remain the small change of that great talent which could produce Eight Bells or The Fox Hunt. In their

sharpness of seeing, their vivacity of handling, their luminous and intense coloring, they give a different pleasure from that which we receive from the masterpieces—a pleasure, at times, even more keen—but, as I think, a pleasure of a somewhat lower kind.

It is, however, a matter of very little importance whether we like better Homer's watercolors or his oil paintings, since it is the same man who produced both. And, indeed, the difference between his performance in the two mediums is a difference of degree rather than of kind—a difference of relative emphasis only—the whole Homer being, after all, necessary to account for anything he did. The consumate designer of the great compositions based his design upon the same acute observation that delights us in the sketches; the brilliant sketcher, though he does not carry design to its ultimate perfection, is yet always a born designer, so that almost any one of his sketches has the possibility of a great picture in it, and his slightest note is a whole, not a mere fragment. To lose any part of his work were to lose something that no one else can give us. Add to the broad humanity, the power of narration and the magnificent design of his major works the exhaustless wealth of his masterful and succinct jottings of natural appearances, and you have the sum of Winslow Homer—surely one of the most remarkable personalities in the art of this or any country in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

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